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The Asian Ecumenical Youth Movement and the East Timor Issue

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The East Timor issue has been recognized as an Asian issue for the past four years by the Asian ecumenical movoments as seen in the active involvement in the issue on a number of occasions, including the most recent 8th Assembly of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) held in Seoul, Korea, June-July, 1985. The details of what took place at the 8th Assembly are well presented in the report entitled *The CCA Assembly's Unfinished Business.* If you are interested in reading the report, you could contact CCA YOUTH, 10 new Industrial Road, 5th Floor, Singapore 1953 in order to get a copy.

I will not go into details, therefore, but in short, the East Timor issue was raised in the middle of the CCA Assembly in an informal but a very visible way, and it captured everyone's attention.

The Indonesian delegation reacted almost violently accusing organizers of the Assembly for allowing it to happen. Indonesian delegates dominated a session of the official assembly, presented their version of the story about East Timor, and never gave a chance to anyone to respond back to what they had presented. Fr. Chico Fernandes, a East Timorese Chatolic priest was arranged to be at the Assembly as a visitor. He stood up, raised his hand in order to let the assembly hear the other side of the story, but was never given a voice. This was possible because the moderator of the session ruled it that way.

However, on the second last day of the Assembly, the Indonesian delegation came up with a statement which surprised the whole assembly. The spokesperson of the delegation announced its decision to withdraw from all CCA decision-making bodies. It was made after the delegation went to the Indonesian Embassy.

At the Assembly there were newspaper articles, leaflets, a drama presentation, cartoons and displays on the East Timor issue, and a forum where Fr. Fernandes presented a paper on the situation in East Timor. But nothing was more effective in impressing everyone about the weight of the East Timor issue than the reaction that the Indonesian delegation made at the Assembly.

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I represent here a network of concerned people in the Asian ecumenical youth movement. A good portion of the work in the network has been coordinated and facilitated by the youth department of CCA. We were introduced to the East Timor issue through the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movememt. At the time of the start of the invasion by the Indonesian Army, our network was not so active as now, and we had to wait until 1983 at the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific Conference in Port Villa, Vanuatu, in the South Pacific, to be more actively involved in the issue. At the Vanuatu meeting there were two very powerful speakers, Messrs. Abilio Araujo and Rocque Rodrigues, representing the struggle for the self-determination of the people of East Timor. I was attending this conference as one of the five delegates from anti-nuclear movements in Japan, but also partly representing the concerns of the Asian ecumenical youth movement. So, it was very natural that we started incorporating the East Timor issue into our scope of concerns and activities.

We have Aotearoa (the name of a nation which is more often called New Zealand in a West-dominated world) within the CCA region, and the indigenous people of Aotearoa, Maori people, have also been strongly backing the raising of the East Timor issue.

The first major event we organized where the East Timor issue was presented as one of our major concerns was the Asian Youth Assembly in Delhi, India in October, 1984. We invited Ms. Mimi Ferreira as an East Timorese speaker, and the Assembly adopted a resolution expressing 'solidarity with the Church and the people of East Timor in their struggle for peace and justice.' The resolution called for a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Indonesian armed forces, dialogue with all parties, and a 'political settlement to uphold the right of the East Timorese to self-determination.'

At this Asian Youth Assembly, however, we already saw the dark side of Indonesia. The planning committee member from Indonesia, after finding out that the East Timor issue was to be raised, boycotted the Assembly. We had over ten participants from Indonesia at the Assembly. Though some of them in private conversations expressed sympathy for the East Timorese people; as the Indonesian delegation they were extremely negative and antagonistic toward the issue being raised. Many of them did not speak much English, and we detected from Malay (almost the same language as Indonesian) speaking participants that the interpretation provided for them among themselves was distorted and misleading. The delegation also went to the Indonesian Embassy in Delhi. They appeared to be totally controlled to behave in the line of the Indonesian government. In constant contact with the Embassy, some members of Indonesian delegation persisted in taking close-up photographs of Ms. Ferreira, making inquiries about her flight route and flight number and passport details. This kind of harrassment and intimidation is serious because every East Timorese has her or his family members and relatives living in the areas under the Indonesian control. For example after addressing a United States Congressional committee one time, Fr. Fernandes heard that one of his close relatives had been killed by the Indonesan military in East Timor.

At the time of adoption of the resolution on East Timor, the Indonesian delegation blackmailed the rest of Assembly by threatening to walk out. A compromise was eventually reached so that the Assembly took official note to record the disagreement of the delegation on the adoption of the resolution. In February, 1985, another department of the Christian Conference of Asia, International Affairs desk organized the Asia Heiwa Conference in Okinawa, Japan. Mr. Jose Ramos-Horta of FRETILIN was invited to be present at the conference. The Asia Heiwa Conference adopted a resolution which was similar in essence to that of the Asia Youth Assembly. Indonesian churches did not send any delegate to this conferece, so there was no interaction directly with Indonesian delegates.

Therefore, the 8th Assembly in Seoul, Korea, June-July, 1985 was actually the third major event in CCA in terms of the East Timor issuse being raised, and the debate has sharply divided some 300 Christians from throughout Asia. At the Seoul Assembly, many delegates were as yet new to the issue, and those who actively supported were strong but still in the minority. However, the concern has been growing as can be seen in the fact that more than 100 churches and church-related organizations in the Asia-Pacific region appealed for human rights in East Timor to the CCA Assembly. The list of those who signed up is included in *The CCA Assembly's Unfinished Business.* East Timor has already become a major issue in the region.

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We have been more and more convinced that the East Timor issue is an Asian issue. It is so much linked up with the democratization of the whole of Asia, and especially of the Indonesian society. As long as the military dictatorship controls the country, the government will keep its people uninformed or mis-informed and control them to act against much smaller neighbors just next to them.

What our past experiences teach us about the situation in which Indonesian people have to live is:

1. They are informed very little about the situation in East Timor.
2. At a meeting overseas, they always keep constant contact with the Embassy and seem to follow their instructions.
3. They sometimes try to present their explanation on the issue, but it is just a copied version from the information from the Indonesian government and they are not well delivered to be at all persuasive. When questions are raised, they often have no answer.
4. Although as a group they respond very negatively when the issue is raised, some individuals certainly become sympathetic towards East Timorese people. They privately express such feelings to friends from different countries.
5. There seem to be some members included in an Indonesian delegation for a meeting overseas to act for the Indonesian government/military/intelligence. They probably are the ones who engineer two things: 1) conducting actions for harrassment and intimidation of East Timorese speakers, 2) keeping every Indonesian member under control so that no one could openly express oneself to be sympathetic to the East Timorese people.

At a preparatory meeting for organizing a forum on East Timor during the CCA Seoul Assembly, the Rev. Sato Kunihiro, Moderator of the National Christian Council of Japan, told participants, "My country invaded many other countries in 1940's. We people in Japan were completely under the control of information from our government. We did not know what was happening."

"This is a confession and a kind of advice not to follow our history. We Japanese delegates stood up on this issue of East timor not to condemn, but because of our history" he said.

When Indonesia becomes a more democratic country, the Indonesian people will come to know more about the situation in East Timor, and it would become very hard for the government to keep waging war against East Timorese people because it clearly violates universally recognized rights of people for self-determination and basic human rights, and it is also costing so much in expenses both in lives of soldiers and in finance. Or, if we could let more people in Indonesia know exactly what is happening in East Timor, democratization movements will grow stronger.

As we see in the case of the Philippines where the people's power successfully overthrew the Marcos dictatorship and installed a much more popular-supported government led by President Corazon Aquino, no dictatorship lasts forever, and coalition of different forces with wide support of people can bring a major change. The recent achievement of the Filipino people greatly encouraged many people in the world fighting for democracy, especially in the neighboring Asian countries. There has been wide international support for the movements against Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, and as a result, a lot of information was shared from overseas into the Philippines and vice versa. We believe that such flow of information partly created the conditions for the political change at the end of February in Manila.

In the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, India, etc., our support network for the self-determination of East Timorese people is already active, and in more countries there are people exposed to the issue and they are much concerned. In fact the East Timor issue has been taken as one of the most important issues together with the militarization and the nuclearization of the Asia-Pacific region, industrial hazards and pollution caused chiefly by transnational corporations, oppression of the minorities in many countries, etc. We, in the Asian ecumenical youth movement, have been seeking a stronger movement link with our sisters and brothers in the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific

movement, and there, the East Timor issue has been a very important item on the common agenda for a long time. We are preparing ourselves further to take up another issue with certain similar setting, West Papua ("Irian Jaya" is the expression from the Indonesian side) issue.

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We have been using the expression "self-determination" for many years. The Indonesian government as well as many other governments in the world will be in full agreement with this principle. At the time of independence of Indonesia and most other nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, self-determination of colonized peoples from the yoke of colonialism was at stake. Today, the meaning of self-determination has not changed in essence but is much enlarged and deepened. What is at stake now is the self-determination of people in all levels. Not only every nation-state but every unit in a state, either ethnically, religiously, culturally or geographically distinct, must have the rights of self-determination. In many countries the national boundaries are made artificially as the trace of colonial division of the world by imperialistic powers. That is why there are so many boarder disputes in the world. But moreover, more importanly, many groups of those who are the minorities and/or indigenous peoples are increasingly claiming their rights of self-determination all over the world. This is the trend of the world today and it is irreversible; for example, Indonesia could never be made back into a Dutch colony. This is why there are many so-called "micro-states" born in the past ten years or so in the Pacific, the Caribbeans, etc. We all know that the peoples of the still remaining colonies such as in the Pacific will exercise their right of self-determination sooner or later, the South Africa will become a country where the black African people are the masters in their own land, and likewise, East Timor will gain back its full independence. And if a country like Indonesia tries to prevent different groups of its people from exercising the right of self-diterminination, it will surely fall apart as the logical consequence, for people will fight for separation till the end. The only way to keep integrity is to let every group exercise the right of self-determanation and let everyone decide spontaneously that it is good for the group to stay in the state. Then they will form a union. This is a very democratic process, and we need in the present world this kind of democracy.

Therefore, the East Timorese people who are in the struggle should not just be seen as the late-comers in the war for independence, but should be understood as the fore-runners who are leading the struggle for the full self-determination in much a deeper sense of today.

This is actually why the Asian ecumenical youth movement supports the East Timorese people in their struggle. We are in the same struggle in many parts of Asia in such a sense that we are learning much from the people of East Timor, and being so much encouraged by them. We would like to keep raising the East Timor issue in different meetings and events in Asia until the time our friends in Indonesia take it up to work directly with the East Timorese people. We would like to invite all of you to join more than a hundred of churches and church-related organizations in the Asia-Pacific region appealing for human rights in East Timor.

Thank you.